

Poems

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imaginative realism, if the medieval barbarity of the existing law concerning male homosexuality were recognised and abandoned.

This would require an alteration of the existing law by Parliament, whereby male homosexuality, ceased to be criminal in itself; leaving all forms of sexual offence involving injury or insult to others to be dealt with under simpler laws which were no longer founded upon discrimination between men and women, or between homosexuality and heterosexuality. It must be remembered that homosexual tendencies are the outcome not of choice but of affliction; and neither judges nor society as a whole are helped by the persistence of unjust and vindictive laws.

Walt Whitman:

P O E M S

*Vigil for boy of responding kisses (never again on earth responding):
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain—vigil I never forget, how as day
brightened,
I rose from the chill ground, and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.*

*When I peruse the conquered fame of heroes, and the victories of
mighty generals,
I do not envy the generals,
Nor the President in his Presidency, nor the rich in his great house:
But when I read of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was with them,
How through life, through dangers, odium, unchanging, long, and long,
Through youth, and through middle and old age, how unfaltering, how
affectionate and faithful they were,
Then I am pensive—I hastily put down the book, and walk away, filled
with the bitterest envy.*

*I believe the main purport of These States is to found a superb friend-
ship, exalté, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting,
latent in all men.*

*Come, I will make the continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon;
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.
I will plant companionship thick as trees all along the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies;*

*I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks;
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.
For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.*

*

*O I think it is not for life that I am chanting here my chant of lovers—I
think it must be for Death,*

*For how calm, how solemn it grows, to ascend to the atmosphere
of lovers,*

*Death or life I am then indifferent—my soul declines to prefer,
I am not sure but the high soul of lovers welcomes death most;
Indeed, O Death, I think now these leaves mean precisely the same as
you mean;*

*Grow up taller, sweet leaves, that I may see! Grow up out of my breast!
Spring away from the concealed heart there!
Do not fold yourselves so, in your pink-tinged roots, timid leaves!
Do not remain down there so ashamed, herbage of my breast!*

*O here I last saw him that tenderly loves me—and returns again, never
to separate from me,
And this, O this shall henceforth be the token of comrades—this
Calamus-root shall,
Interchange it, youths, with each other! Let none render it back!*

*O you when I often and silently come where you are, that I may be
with you;
As I walk by your side, or sit near, or remain in the same room with you,
Little you know the subtle, electric fire that for your sake is playing
within me.*

*If you be not silently selected by lovers, and do not silently select lovers,
Of what use is it that you seek to become elect of mine?*

*Earth, my likeness!
Though you look so impassive, ample and spheric there,
I now suspect that is not all;
I now suspect there is something fierce in you, eligible to burst forth;
For an athlete is enamoured of me—and I of him,
But toward him there is something fierce and terrible in me,
eligible to burst forth,
I dare not tell it in word—not even in these songs.*

